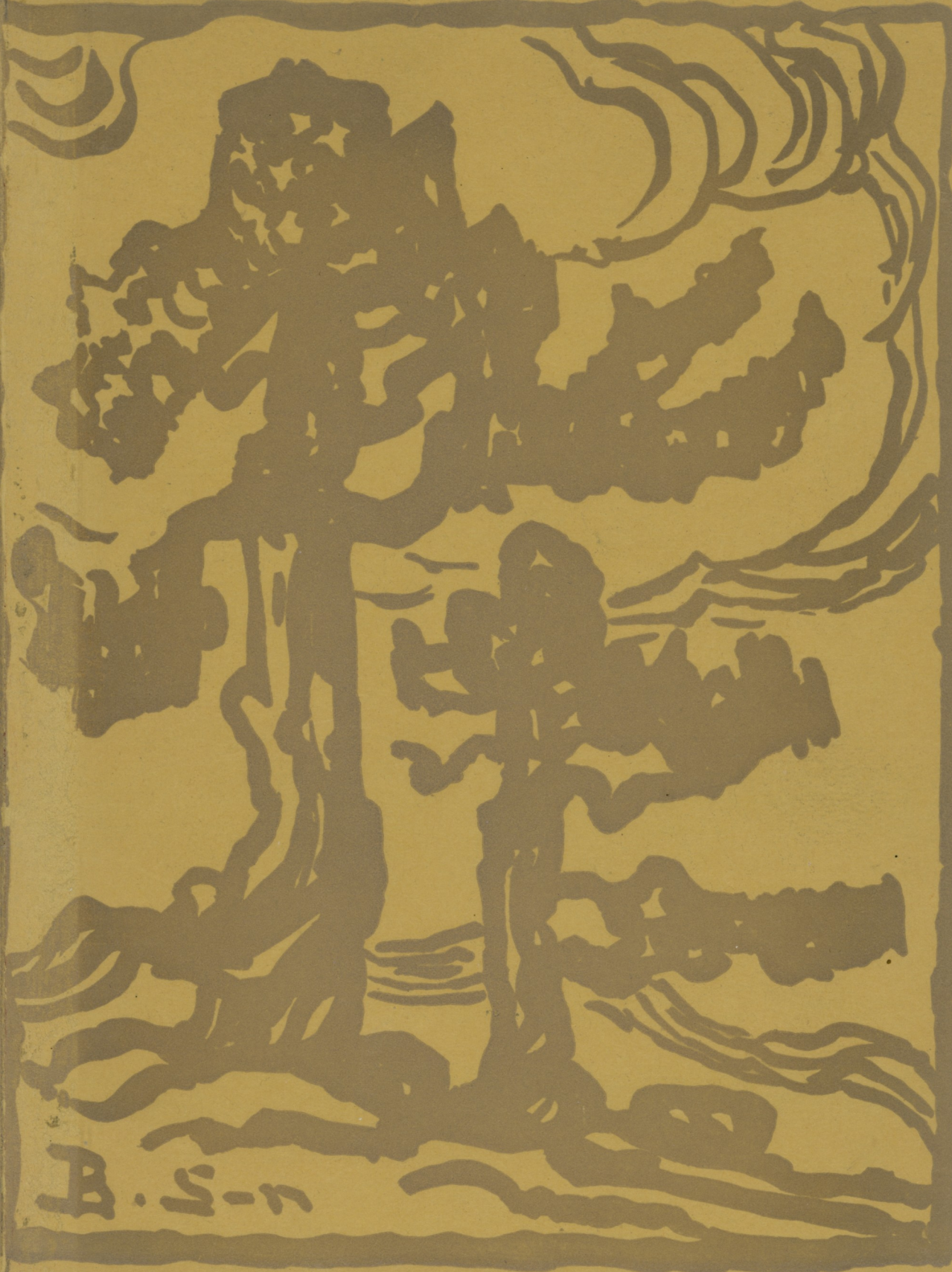


Babcock Galleries.

**The Birger Sandzén exhibition / introduction and
catalogue Christian Brinton.**





THE FIRST COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF BIRGER SANDZÉN
IS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ASSOCIATED CHAPTERS OF THE
AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION. ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DR.
CHRISTIAN BRINTON. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MR. JAMES CREESE,
ACTING SECRETARY TO THE AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION,
TWENTY-FIVE WEST FORTY-FIFTH STREET, NEW YORK CITY





CEDARS

THE
BIRGER SANDZÉN
EXHIBITION

INTRODUCTION AND CATALOGUE

By
CHRISTIAN BRINTON



THE BABCOCK GALLERY
NEW YORK CITY

1922



SENTINEL ROCK

759.8

Sta 97c

SVEN BIRGER SANDZÉN

By CHRISTIAN BRINTON

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

IT IS inevitable that the West, a veritable dream world of far-sweeping spaces, gigantesque forms, and resplendent colouration, should appeal to an artist possessing the traditions and temperament of Birger Sandzén, for the Viking urge, which this son of the restless Goths shares, is surely akin to the pioneer spirit that pushed across the plains and paused in primal awe at the foothills of the Rockies. The sturdy-souled man whose earnest, isolated effort has for a quarter of a century spread itself over Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California—whose cherished themes are riven pine trunk, bleached arroyo, boldly jutting butte, and dantesque canyon—was born in the parish of Blidsberg, province of Västergötland, Sweden, February 5, 1871.

As the son of refined, cultured parents, there was no opposition to the lad's determination to become an artist, the only stipulation being that he first complete his academic studies. The College of Skara, fronting the fine old Gothic cathedral, and the justly famed University of Lund, were the scenes of the young man's scholastic apprenticeship, which terminated when, at the age of twenty, he entered the private school of the Konstnärsförbundet, or Artists' League, in Stockholm. His preceptors were Zorn, Per Hasselberg, and Richard Bergh, and it is for the ardent, inspiring Bergh that he retains the most abiding reverence and affection. Following certain changes in

the personnel of the school, Sandzén left for Paris, where the future painter of scarred mountain slope and tinted desert studied for a time with Aman-Jean.

In the autumn of 1894, following his Paris sojourn, we find Birger Sandzén, cultured cosmopolite, accomplished musician and linguist, as well as painter of promise, installed as professor of languages and art history in Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. It is around Lindsborg, a small, typically mid-Western, Swedish-American town, that have since focussed Sandzén's activities. And it is from Lindsborg that he to-day sends forth into the world those veracious, affirmative transcriptions of the plastic majesty and polychromatic splendour of the West, which are at once a record and an evocation.

The artistic acclimatization of Birger Sandzén has been deliberate. He did not rush with jaunty nonchalance toward that wonderland of form and colour which seemed to await his coming. He studied and absorbed much before touching brush to canvas, or burin to block. And the sage counsel of Olof Erlandsson, his boyhood master, came often to mind during those early, tentative days. The initial landscapes are intimate and lyric, not epic and universal in appeal, while the treatment of the surfaces fails to disclose that robust integrity of touch which is to-day the hallmark of his production.

Though he began painting in the Smoky River district near Lindsborg, it was during the summers spent at the family farmstead in Graham County that Birger Sandzén grasped the essential significance of Western landscape. Wild Horse Creek, with its tawny sandstone banks seen in the flush of afternoon or the suffused glow of evening, with the moon stealing up behind

the scattered cottonwood trees, was the first artistic motif that Sandzén made definitely his own. This was the aesthetic microcosm out of which he evolved the mastery of after years.

Despite his routine duties as preceptor, and certain heavy domestic responsibilities, Birger Sandzén gradually extended his sphere of interest and activity. Flat or gently undulant Kansan prairies have been succeeded by trips to Colorado, chiefly in the vicinity of Manitou, to Arizona, and to New Mexico, where the colouration is more radiant and fantastic, and where he sketches along the Rio Grande or among the fateful, cliff-hollowed Cities That Died of Fear. And California, with its immemorial cedars, sequoias, and shimmering sea marge, has likewise been visited by the insatiate wanderer who, during a single summer, will cover hundreds of miles in passionate quest of sympathetic subject.

The fruits of these pilgrimages, sometimes completed on the spot, but more often developed synthetically in the modest, vine-screened studio at Lindsborg, constitute the artistic achievement of Birger Sandzén. Equally at home in oils, water colours, lithography, or the delectable field of the woodcut, Sandzén dedicates his energies solely to the task of depicting the spacious West and Southwest. And yet, to find a fitting parallel for the work of Birger Sandzén, it is necessary to turn toward his native country, to recall the austere, deeply romantic Nordström, the decorative vision of Helmer Osslund, or the remote splendour of Axel Sjöberg's views of Northland mountain and skerry. This art is, before all else, Nordic in spirit. It typifies that abiding love of the open, that sense of free, paganistic affinity with the out-of-doors which stands in direct antithesis to the scholastic

formalism of the Latins. As is the case with his kinsmen of the homeland, it is not man but nature who is the protagonist of these vigorous canvases, and broadly stroked black and whites.

Not the least essential feature of aesthetic production is the successful affirmation of personality, the struggle toward a fitting form of self-expression, and this is the problem which has confronted Birger Sandzén during the lean, obscure years of probation passed at Lindsborg. That free play of the consciously creative spirit which he so ardently seeks, finds outlet in the oil paintings and sketches, but more specifically, it seems, in the luminous aquarelles, and in the graphic work, wherein there remains no hint of the persistency of the medium. It is here that rich pigmentation, bold structural design, and the mighty rhythm of earth and sky speak a language wholly their own. This art here attains that magic fusion of vision and statement which, while frankly basing itself upon reality, also wins its coveted release from reality.

Birger Sandzén's struggle for public recognition and support has been fraught with delays and disappointments. Not wishing to adopt the business of picture making and picture peddling, he has retained his academic post in the little mid-Western town, quietly biding his appointed time. At first he used to send a few paintings and drawings to the local print shops of Lindsborg, or to Smalley's in McPherson. A decade ago he was invited to exhibit in Kansas City, and more recently in Chicago. Apart from a few casual instances, the present exhibition constitutes his first appearance in the East. Yet his position is at last assured, and it has been won in faith and fortitude. He has, in all verity, lifted his eyes unto the hills—and not in vain.

CATALOGUE

OIL PAINTINGS

- 1 SUNSET IN THE GRAND CANYON. 1915
- 2 TWILIGHT. Lindsborg, 1916
- 3 A VETERAN—PORTRAIT STUDY. Lindsborg, 1917
- 4 A PIONEER—PORTRAIT STUDY. Lindsborg, 1919
- 5 PEONIES. Lindsborg, 1919
- 6 SUNFLOWERS. Lindsborg, 1919
- 7 IN THE ROCKIES. Manitou, Colorado, 1919
- 8 FRUIT AND PITCHER. Lindsborg, 1919
- 9 TOWARD EVENING. Manitou, Colorado, 1919
- 10 ROAD IN NEW MEXICO. Sante Fé, New Mexico, 1919
- 11 AFTERGLOW. Manitou, Colorado, 1919
- 12 MOONLIGHT. Sante Fé, New Mexico, 1919
- 13 WILLOWS BY THE RIO GRANDE, San Felipe, 1919
- 14 IN THE BLACK CANYON. Manitou, Colorado, 1920
- 15 A MOUNTAIN LAKE. Jefferson County, Colorado, 1920
- 16 LAKE WELLINGTON AT MOONRISE, Colorado, 1920
- 17 WILD HORSE CREEK. Graham County, Kansas, 1921
- 18 CREEK AT MOONRISE. Graham County, Kansas, 1921
- 19 THE OLD HOMESTEAD. McPherson County, Kansas, 1921
- 20 CEDARS. Manitou, Colorado, 1921
- 21 ROCK AND CEDAR. Manitou, Colorado, 1921
- 22 TWO PINES. Manitou, Colorado, 1921



ROCKS, SNOW, AND PINES



WILD HORSE CREEK



ROCKS AND SNOW



CEDARS, Garden of the Gods

THE CATALOGUE ARRANGED BY DR. CHRISTIAN BRINTON AFTER ORIGINAL
DESIGNS BY BIRGER SANDZÉN. ENGRAVED AND PRINTED FOR THE
AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION BY THE REDFIELD-KENDRICK-
ODELL COMPANY, INC., NEW YORK CITY. EDITION LIMITED TO TWENTY-
FIVE HUNDRED COPIES. COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY CHRISTIAN BRINTON



N200
Sa4 B11
Sandzén





BROOKLYN MUSEUM LIBRARIES



50000000346741

Brooklyn Museum
Library Preservation
MARCH 2012

